

Woodland of the Black Isle

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The Black Isle



The scenery of the Black Isle is dominated by three “f”s, farmland, firths and forest. In Scotland the word forest signifies a vast tract of countryside; this is usually moorland, sometimes bare, sometimes with relics of former woodland, but often planted to a monoculture for commercial use. Forest and Land Scotland has many holdings on the Black Isle which include one extensive area of commercial forest on the ridge of the Black Isle, which the Ordnance Survey calls the Milbuie and Findon Forest - one name for over 35 square km of coniferous plantation.

View below Culbokie: Firth, farmland and forest

That apart, the Black Isle has numerous smaller woods, many privately owned with far less thought of an economic return from ownership, and these form a landscape patchwork partnered with the agricultural land. These woods are surprisingly diverse. There are woods dominated by beech, other woods dominated by oak, others dominated by birch, and of course woodland of firs, pines and spruces, as is common in Highland Scotland.

Woods and forest of The Black Isle

The Ordnance Survey name over 70 areas of woodland on the Black Isle. Other smaller woods have names only known to locals. Under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, all the woods are open for exploration, irrespective of whether footpaths are marked on maps. Some woods contain areas so dense that without animal tracks they would be impenetrable.

Forest and Land Scotland has five woods on the Black Isle to which they encourage visitors by providing parking areas and information either on the ground or through their website. These are Munloch Cloutie Well, Culbokie Wood, Monadh Mòr, Ord Hill (North Kessock) and Learnie Red Rocks. The RSPB also manage The Fairy Glen at Rosemarkie. These Visitor Attractions feature in Guide Books and the websites of Visit Scotland, Highland Tourism and rental property owners. But the majority of woods are local woods enjoyed by local residents for relaxation and dog-walking. These are the gems of the Black Isle, and only if visitors stay long enough to “live like a local” will they become better known beyond the immediate area. Part of the pleasure of visiting our woods is that you will hardly see anybody, yet find so much to satisfy a natural curiosity.

It is sad that the very moment a wood is at the apex of its interest, it will be at maturity, and then foresters thin or clear-fell the wood, or winter storms wreak havoc leading to leaning and up-rooted trees. Then there is a period of devastation before natural regrowth and intentional plantings start the cycle again. Many Black Isle woods have been harvested in the last ten years, and one looks back nostalgically, bemoaning subsequent forestry operations. But that is the life of woodland.



FLS Munloch Clotie Well, Littleburn Wood

The best of the Black Isle woods

There are some real treasures on the Black Isle:

For wooded ravines with history, Drummondreach Oak Wood and The Fairy Glen
For Silver Birch woodland, Ryefield Wood and Arkendeith Wood
For Beech, Drummondreach Oakwood



Beech trees in Drummondreach Oak Wood

For woodland with extensive views, Taindore Plantation, Drumderfit Hill
For woodland with lochs, Culbokie Wood and Newlands of Ferintosh
For woodland with sea views, Gallowhill Wood, Ord Hill (North Kessock), Lundie Woodland, South Sutor



View over Kilmuir and the Moray Firth from Ord Hill, North Kessock

For scientific interest, Dam Wood SSSI, Braelangwell SSSI
For bog forest, Monadh Mòr



Bog forest of Monadh Mòr

For autumn colour, Craig Wood, Fairy Glen, Drummondreach Oak Wood

For bluebells, Drummondreach Oak Wood, Rosehaugh Estate woodlands, Cromarty House woodlands

For snowdrops, Rosehaugh Estate woodlands



Snowdrops in Rosehaugh Estate

On the Geograph website, I have written a long article on Black Isle Woodlands that includes one photograph each from over 90 Black Isle woods and a link to a map of each one. The article may be accessed at

<https://www.geograph.org.uk/article/Woodland-of-the-Black-Isle/1>

This is where to go to get an impression of the less well-known woods on the Black Isle. I hope this article and the compilation on Geograph will give residents and visitors alike the incentive to leave their comfort zones and explore somewhere new. Many worry where a car may be parked. At the moment there is usually some suitable place nearby, but, if indeed the smaller woods become more popular, it will be doubly important to be considerate and to be careful not to block passing places or hinder the day-to-day life of farmers, foresters and landowners. Many of the woods are privately owned. The Ordnance Survey delineates nationally owned woodland from private woodland, so please be even more respectful of the wishes of private owners who are not so used to their woods being admired or entered.